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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by New Humanity, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

1. The family is a common heritage of the world. This heritage has naturally emerged among all peoples as they have advanced along their paths of development and this allows us to depict a basic structure of the family.

2. As the primary element of natural society, the family possesses its own unique rights. It lies at the center of social life and of the reality that societies face. The family develops a "human ecology" by providing a setting where a human being receives his/her first crucial, practical, and intellectual notions and learns how to relate to his/her natural, social, and physical environment. He/she learns how to love and what being loved means and, therefore, concretely, what it means to be a human person.

3. We do not define the obligations and values that the human person lives out in the family in a contract. They stem from the essence of the family itself founded on a stabilizing conjugal pact and structured by the relationships that develop within the family.

4. Family relationships form the archetype of every other community relationship because the family always focuses its attention on the human person as an end and not as a means. The well-being of the human person in the family links closely to the healthy functioning of society.

5. The family's original and essential social subjectivity precedes and forms the foundation for the civil community and the state. Every society formed to serve the good of men and women cannot disregard the central role and of the family in the formation of that society.

The family in the European Union

6. Considering data on the situation of the family from one region of the world as an example, we can observe the specific evolution today of family life in the European Union. Reports, statistics, and considerations concerning the family consistently speak of a crisis.

7. Here are some data:
Decrease of the birth-rate and consequent ageing of the population -- Over the past 25 years the European youth population (under 14 years of age) has decreased by 21.6% and represents only 16.4% of the population.

Marriages -- From 1980 to 2004, in the 25 member states of the European Union, marriages have fallen by 663,600 couples despite the increase of the population by 31.1 million.

Divorce: From 1990 to 2004, in 15 Countries of the EU, more than 10 million marriages have failed involving more than 16 million children[1].

[1] Data of the Institute for Family policies, February 2006.

8. Despite these figures, the family remains close to the hearts of many people. Everywhere in the world, people desire and need family ties as young people repeatedly affirm when surveyed. The problem becomes how to bring about the family that one would want, or that one sees as necessary.

9. Continuing our observation of the European situation, we note that the "sectors" of activity of the European Union do not include a sector on the family preferring to address family issues within individual countries. Over the years, political and economic decisions of the European Union have had strong repercussions on families. We perceive a growing awareness that a lack of family policies and implementation of general policies that neglect the family dimension can exacerbate various forms of social unrest.

10. The EU conferences of Dublin (June 2004) and Vienna (February 2006) have given signs of a new attention to the family.

Proposal for the present day family

11. In the family, men and women respond to the great questions of our time, such as, relationships between a man and a woman and between generations; relationships among cultures, races, religions, the ageing, AIDS and other health issues, the problems of marginalization, etc. As an example in the economic field, the family carries out fundamental societal functions as consumers and savers and as the place where lifestyles develop. Through children, the family supplies our future workforce. Through civic participation and giving, it strengthens the sense of belonging to the community.

12. Considering these aspects, we propose that the Commission on Social Development carefully consider the perspective of the family in planning development programs at various levels. We urge the commission to involve family representatives when considering issues and decisions affecting areas such as the job market, the environment, education, school services, transportation, and all other fields where the family is naturally involved. Engaging families and family organizations in the study and implementation of a broad range of family-related projects will help ensure that families will not only be considered a recipient of services. They will take an active part in the search for ways to advance the global well-being of society as a whole.